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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 06 TEL AVIV 000245

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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Proposed Russia-Syria Arms Deal
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Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz and Maariv led with, and all media extensively reported on, Israel's concerns that a planned Russian weapons sale to Syria could reach Hizbullah and Palestinian terror groups. The deal includes advanced shoulder-held anti-aircraft SA-18 missiles; some media say it also includes ground-to-ground "Iskander E" missiles -- an advanced, precise version of the Scud. Israel Radio cited IDF sources as saying that the Israel Air Force knows how to cope with anti-aircraft missiles; on the other hand, Ha'aretz quoted Uzi Rubin, a former head of the Homa missile defense project in the Defense Ministry, as saying before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, that Iskander E missiles could tip the power balance in favor of Syria, and that they pose a threat to American forces in Iraq as well (Rubin also cited the threat posed to Israel and the U.S. forces in Iraq by Iran's Shihab 4 missile, which is currently under development). Maariv and Israel Radio reported that PM Sharon has written to President Vladimir Putin, asking him not to put Israel at risk. The media reported that Israel has recalled its ambassador from Moscow, perhaps for consultations. Yediot quoted Russia's Deputy FM Alexander Saltanov, who met last week with FM Silvan Shalom and Shimon Peres, as saying: "Russia will take Israel's interests into account." Leading media reported that Wednesday the State Department expressed strong opposition to the deal, and that it hinted at threats of sanctions on Syria should the deal take place. Spokesman Richard Boucher said Washington is against the sale of deadly military equipment to Syria, which is a "state sponsor of terrorism." Incidentally, several media quoted Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov as saying that the U.S. and Russia may be close to signing an agreement to help control the trafficking of shoulder-fired aircraft missiles, a weapon highly prized by terrorists.

Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli officials are expected to tell visiting EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana today that Israel will not begin diplomatic negotiations with the PA simply because Abbas was elected PA chairman.

Israel Radio reported from Washington that the U.S. administration intends to deepen its involvement in the region and that it is considering naming either a permanent envoy to the Middle East, who would be secretary of state-designate Condoleezza Rice's direct

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subordinate and reside in the region, or a State Department coordinator who would exclusively devote his work to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Citing recent pressure by European and Arab officials on the U.S. to alter its strategy -- they reportedly told the U.S. administration that otherwise PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) would resign and a civil war erupt in the territories -- Ha'aretz (English Ed.) also mentions the possibility of President Bush appointing a presidential envoy in the Middle East, saying that former secretary of state James Baker is the preferred

candidate for the position; the newspaper also brings the name of former U.S. representative to the UN John Davenport (sic: read Danforth). The radio reported that PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and Sharon could be invited separately to the White House in March.

Ha'aretz (Aluf Benn) reported that the Israel-U.S. dispute concerning the Harpy drones Israel sold to China is on the verge of resolution.

Jerusalem Post writes that right-wing activist leaders told the newspaper that radical elements in the anti-disengagement camp have "agents" in the security forces helping them in their struggle.

Yediot and Jerusalem Post highlighted the "heavy price" Sharon is willing to pay to add Shas to his government coalition -- 1 billion shekels (around USD 230 million) for social welfare in exchange for support of the disengagement plan.

Rashid Abu Shabak, the commander of the PA's Preventative Security in the Gaza Strip, was quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv that the PA will do everything to prevent violence. Jerusalem Post reported that the independent Gaza newspaper Donia Al-Watan on Wednesday published a story about a civil lawsuit filed by a local resident against PA Foreign Minister Nabil Shaath over alleged corruption.

The media reported that the Haifa Magistrate's Court on Wednesday sentenced Sheikh Raed Salah, the leader of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement, to three and a half years in prison for security offenses. Salah was also slapped with a three-year suspended sentence. Jerusalem Post quoted Salah as saying that Israel would last less than 20 years if another group of Israeli Arabs was "unjustly" arrested and put on trial as his group had allegedly been.

Leading media reported that on Wednesday, the High Court of Justice ordered to release Staff Sergeant Yossi Pilant, a resident of the settlement of Yitzhar, who was sentenced to 28 days in military jail for calling on soldiers to refuse to serve orders to evacuate two caravans in his settlement. The High Court said that the military court's sentence was flawed, and that the IDF was entitled to put Pilant on trial a second time.

Under the headline, "Carter Presents: Hypocrisy," Yediot reported that while Sharon and Shalom received former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, who headed the international Palestinian election monitoring team, Carter told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution in a "harsh interview" that Sharon is opposed to the road map.

Ha'aretz cited the Amman registration center for the January 30 parliamentary elections in Iraq as saying Thursday that Israelis of Iraqi origin may take part in the voting. The newspaper quoted Shlomo Hillel, former Knesset speaker and winner of the Israel Prize for his activity on behalf of Iraq's Jews, as saying Wednesday that if former Iraqis living in Israel may vote in the elections, "it would be a very significant step signaling Iraq's willingness to change direction." Conversely, Ha'aretz quoted National Infrastructure Minister and former defense minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, who immigrated to Israel from Iraq at age 12, as saying that he does not believe Israelis will vote "because anyone who sees Israel as his country will not vote in the Iraqi elections."

Yediot reported that incoming Interior Minister Ophir Pines-Paz has instructed that the question about religion in the form distributed to all tourists entering Israel be removed.

Ha'aretz reported the Foreign Ministry will set up a department to fight anti-Semitism and to commemorate the Holocaust.

1. Proposed Russia-Syria Arms Deal:

Summary:

Defense and foreign affairs columnist Amir Oren wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (January 13): "The key to the limitation of the Russian-Syrian missile deal is to be found in Washington."

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "What are the Russian arms dealers seeking there? The main factor behind all these strange developments is the situation in Chechnya."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv: "[As the Israeli leadership sees it,] the main thing is that we do not surrender to Assad's peace maneuvers and negotiation spins."

Block Quotes:

I. "Washington Has the Key to Defusing the Crisis"

Defense and foreign affairs columnist Amir Oren wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (January 13): "The key to the limitation of the Russian-Syrian missile deal is to be found in Washington. U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who hosted his Russian counterpart Sergey Ivanov on Tuesday, talked with him about the Russian commitment to avoid disseminating anti-aircraft shoulder-fired missiles, which could reach terrorists seeking to down civilian airliners. At a joint press conference, Ivanov said that the Russians had completed their version of a draft of a treaty providing for the mutual transfer of information about such missiles (MANPADs).... Ivanov stressed that scrupulous supervision and that the signing of the treaty can be expected soon.... Despite the fact that Ivanov's announcement was released even before the deal with Syria became known, it matches the Russian will to minimize Israel's concern about the trickling of ground-to-air missiles to terrorist elements in Lebanon and the territories."

II. "Russian Crisis"

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 13): "Something bad is happening in Russia. The behavior of its president, Vladimir Putin, has been incomprehensible of late, contradictory and illogical.... Now, the renewal of arms deals between Russia and Syria, a small and poor Arab country, which angers the U.S. and which gives support and immunity to terror organizations has been added to the dismal picture. What are the Russian arms dealers seeking there? The main factor behind all these strange developments is the situation in Chechnya. The Putin administration is not only unable to stabilize the pro-Russian government there, it stands exposed and powerless in face of the anticipated wave of murderous terror attacks. The failure in Chechnya, along with the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians and soldiers, has undermined the balance of the Russian leadership; it has raised to the surface dark political forces and is sowing a storm of irrationality in the Kremlin. A Russian crisis is developing, which constitutes a real danger to the stability of the entire world."

III. "Pressure"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv (January 13): "If the [Russian-Syrian arms] deal really goes through in the end, the IDF will have to rethink fundamental assumptions that no longer apply. It is already impossible to fly freely over the Gaza Strip, and soon it will be impossible to fly freely over Lebanon, Syria, the northern border. Army intelligence will have to work hard in order to spot the tiny missiles being removed from their vehicles (the Russians will sell the Syrians the motorized version), turning into their miniature version and somehow getting into Nasrallah's hands. And then, anything is possible. It looks like we will learn to live with that, too. [But, as the Israeli leadership sees it,] the main thing is that we do not surrender to Assad's peace maneuvers and negotiation spins."

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Summary:

Prof. Uzi Arad, who was a senior strategic advisor to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Fulfilling the American expectations is ... a clear-cut Israeli interest."

Block Quotes:

"No Automatic Pilot For Disengagement"

Prof. Uzi Arad, who was a senior strategic advisor to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (January 13): "There are those who treat the disengagement as if it is operating on 'automatic pilot.' However, a pragmatic approach requires demonstrating sensitivity to changing circumstances, and those who support the plan must take action to improve the problematic equation between its risks and opportunities.... [Among other conditions,] Israel cannot dismiss the American demand, which has also been made to the Europeans, to work for deepening democracy in Palestinian society. Fulfilling the American expectations is also a clear-cut Israeli interest. It is where to find the long-term answer to Palestinian acceptance of the Jewish state and a permanent agreement. But above all, the most important thing is to do everything possible to reduce the 'democratic deficit' that has built up in the decision-making process toward the disengagement."

13. Iraq:

Summary:

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "American mistakes are leading Iraq and the region into a worrying direction."

Block Quotes:

"Iraq's Slippery Slope"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 13): "The Americans have erred in some strategic decisions they made concerning a proud and despondent nation [Iraq], which had in the past been the intellectual heart of the Arab world. One of those mistakes was the dismantling of the 'Arab Army,' i.e. the Iraqi army.... The 'democratic constitution' that was dictated to the Iraqis has turned into a farce; no community intends to carry it out.... It is too bad that Iraq was not immediately split into three different countries.... Lastly, how were the Americans been so foolish in organization those proportional elections?.... It surely is too much to expect a country that has always been controlled by the fear of the other to immediately become a democracy that protects minorities. Those American mistakes are leading Iraq and the region into a worrying direction. The unending wave of terror, the looming elections, and the loss of the ability to govern, could bring down Iraq in the next few weeks to the edge of a civil war."

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